

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BRUSSE 01382 182054Z

67

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 USIE-00 CIAE-00

PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 MC-02 ACDA-05 EB-07 COME-00 /064 W

----- 084640

O R 181921Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3173

SEC DEFENSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE

USDAF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 01382

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, MASS, BE

SUBJECT: F-104 REPLACEMENT

REF BRUSSELS 1381

1. THE BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY TELLS US THAT THE DEFENSE MINISTERS OF THE FOUR INVOLVED EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AGREED THAT NATIONAL TEAMS FROM THE FOUR COUNTRIES SHOULD GO TO WASHINGTON NEXT WEEK TO RECEIVE THE U.S. ANSWERS TO THEIR QUESTIONS.

2. WE ARE TOLD THAT THE NORWEGIAN DEFENSE MINISTER WILL PROPOSE THAT THE FOUR NATIONAL TEAMS GO TO WASHINGTON ON FEBRUARY 25 AND 26. WHEN REMINDED THAT THE TOP LEVELS OF THE PENTAGON WOULD BE OUT OF WASHINGTON ON FEBRUARY 25, THE BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY WONDERED WHETHER FEBRUARY 26 AND 27 WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE.

3. THE BELGIANS ENVISAGE THAT A PART OF THE TIME IN WASHINGTON WOULD BE DEVOTED TO MATTERS THAT THE FOUR NATIONS HAVE IN COMMON AND THAT ANOTHER PART OF THE TIME WOULD BE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BRUSSE 01382 182054Z

DEVOTED TO PURELY BILATERAL QUESTIONS.

4. THE BELGIAN TEAM PROBABLY WILL BE HEADED BY AMBASSADOR VAN DE KERCKHOVE (FOREIGN MINISTRY). HE PROBABLY WILL BE ACCOMPANIED BY CHAMPENOIS (FOREIGN MINISTRY), BOLAND (ECONOMICS MINISTRY), AND LEFEBVRE (DEFENSE MINISTRY).

5. THE BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY SAYS THAT THEY WOULD PREFER TO HAVE OUR ANSWERS IN WRITING. THIS, THE BELGIANS SAY, WOULD AVOID DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE U.S. ANSWERS.

6. IN THE LAST SEVERAL DAYS, THE BELGIANS HAVE BEEN MAKING A SPECIAL POINT OF EMPHASIZING THAT THE FOUR-NATION CONSORTIUM HAS FINISHED ITS WORK AND SHOULD BE TERMINATED. THEY SAY THAT IT IS NOW UP TO NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS TO DECIDE WHAT PLANE TO BUY.

7. THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FOUR NATIONS PLAN TO GO TO PARIS AND STOCKHOLM AFTER THEY HAVE BEEN TO WASHINGTON.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. THE NATURE OF THE U.S. ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS WILL PLAY AN IMPORTANT AND PERHAPS CRUCIAL ROLE IN DETERMINING WHAT PLANE BELGIUM DECIDES TO BUY. THE U.S. ANSWERS WILL BE COMPARED WITH THE FRENCH ANSWERS IN MAKING THE FINAL JUDGMENT AS TO WHICH PURCHASE WILL BENEFIT BELGIUM THE MOST. ALTHOUGH ALL OF THE QUESTIONS ARE IMPORTANT, THE MOST DECISIVE FOR BELGIUM RELATES TO PRICE AND THE FACTORS INFLUENCING PRICE--INFLATION AND FOREIGN EXCHANGE RATES. IF THE U.S. CAN PUT A TIGHT LID ON OUR PRICE AND IF IT REMAINS SUBSTANTIALLY BELOW THE FRENCH PRICE, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT POLITICALLY FOR THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT TO CHOOSE THE FRENCH PLANE. WHAT POLITICIAN WOULD WANT TO DEFEND A POSITION OF HAVING SELECTED A SUBSTANTIALLY INFERIOR AND CONSIDERABLY MORE EXPENSIVE PLANE? THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT INDUSTRIAL COMPENSATION IS NOT IMPORTANT. THE U.S. ANSWERS ON THIS MATTER SHOULD BE AS FORTHCOMING AS POSSIBLE AND CONTRACTORS SHOULD CONTINUE THEIR CURRENT EFFORTS TO DEAL WITH THE CONCERNS OF THE POTENTIAL SUB-CONTRACTORS. BUT PRICE REMAINS THE MOST IMPORTANT ECONOMIC FACTOR.

B. IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FOUR

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BRUSSE 01382 182054Z

NATIONS WILL VISIT PARIS AFTER WASHINGTON AND THAT THE FRENCH MAY WELL BE INFORMED ABOUT THE U.S. ANSWERS BEFORE THEY GIVE THEIR ANSWERS. THUS, THE FRENCH ARE LIKELY TO HAVE A REASONABLY GOOD IDEA OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEY NEED TO IMPROVE THEIR OFFER TO BECOME COMPETITIVE. WASHINGTON MAY WISH TO WITHHOLD GIVING FINAL WRITTEN ANSWERS--IF THIS IS POSSIBLE--UNTIL AFTER THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FOUR COUNTRIES HAVE COME BACK FROM PARIS.

C. THE EXISTENCE OF THE FOUR-NATION CONSORTIUM AND THE INCLINATIONS OF SOME OF THE OTHER COUNTRIES TOWARD AN AMERICAN PLANE HAVE WORKED TO OUR BENEFIT IN BELGIUM. IT IS AN ASSET WE SHOULD TRY TO KEEP. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE OTHER THREE NATIONS FAVOR THE CONTINUATION OF THE FOUR-NATION CONSORTIUM AND THAT ONLY BELGIUM WANTS OUT. IN JUDGING THE BELGIAN REQUEST FOR BILATERAL TALKS, CONSIDERATION SHOULD BE GIVEN TO THE IMPACT OF ANY SUCH TALKS ON THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE FOUR-NATION CONSORTIUM. ALSO, WASHINGTON MAY WISH TO POINT OUT THAT THE U.S. OFFER IS BASED ON THE ASSUMPTION OF THE PARTICIPATION OF THE FOUR NATIONS.RENNER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY AIRCRAFT, MILITARY ASSISTANCE AGREEMENTS, MILITARY POLICIES, MILITARY PLANS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BRUSSE01382
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750058-0082
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750236/aaaabgkm.tel
Line Count: 126
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BRUSSELS 1381
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 APR 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 APR 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <17 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: F-104 REPLACEMENT
TAGS: MASS, MARR, BE, UN
To: STATE DAF
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006